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## Word, Revelation and Interpretation in the Light of the *Dei Verbum*

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**ABSTRACT.** This study aims at presenting the novelty in the ideas on the Word, divine revelation and biblical interpretation, as resulting from the works of the Second Vatican Council. The very title of the constitution on Revelation, "*Dei Verbum*" - the Word of God, is significant in itself. The work focuses on the three key concepts, with the intent of highlighting their specificity and importance. In the background, one can notice the desire to be opened, the wish for dialogue and communion, as elements the Council was based on. Finally, we present some aspects for the interpretation of the Scripture at the beginning of this millennium.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a turning point in the life of the Church of the recent decades. The renewal was visible in the ideas, in theology, and especially in practice, in the pastoral life (it is enough to think of the revolutionary change represented by the service in the language of the people, the active involvement of the laypersons in the Church, etc.). The fruits of the Council are visible at the beginning of the third millennium, as well.

One of the most important documents drafted by this Council was the *Dei Verbum*. The history and stages leading to the approval and promulgation of the constitution (18 November 1965) have been addressed before, so we will not go into details. It is enough to mention the elaborate debates; in fact, the drafting of the document was extended to the entire duration of the Council, as it represented a point of reference. Some of the themes of the discussions included the definition of revelation, the source of revelation; are Tradition and Scripture in opposition? This was an issue that concerned the relationship between Catholics and Protestants. Therefore, the focus was on finding an answer to the question: are the dogmas of the Church extracted only from the Scripture or are they also extracted from the verbal tradition? A first attempt to provide an answer: the two components are closely linked to one another and have been entrusted to the Church as sources for the ecclesial life. Other discussions related to the implementation of the historical and critical method, the inerrancy of the sacred books, the biblical movement, etc.

What were the main points that were clarified? First of all, there was a redefinition of the concept of revelation. *Dei Verbum* 2 uses the image of the communication of God and does not consider revelation to be the presentation of truths. Secondly, a broader notion of Tradition (*Dei Verbum* 8), also stating the unity between Scripture and tradition. At this point, we also have to consider the historical context: the era before the Council when the dispute with the Protestants was still alive, as the Protestants supported the principle of "sola Scriptura". Thirdly, a broader concept regarding inerrancy (*Dei Verbum* 11). It is necessary to support the idea of a redemptive and faithful truth. Finally, a special contribution was represented by the last chapter of the Constitution: the Scripture in the life of the Church. How do we read and interpret the sacred books? How should Christians relate to the Bible (*Dei Verbum* 21), considering P. Claudel's statement: "the respect for the Scripture is unlimited; it is expressed especially by keeping the distance from the Bible" [1].

## 2. THE WORD OF GOD

A great merit of the Council was the focus on the introduction of the concept of the divine word. Before this world synodic event, the documents of the Church focused on other aspects. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII wrote *Providentissimus Deus* (God's action), Pius XII wrote *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943; the action of the Holy Spirit). Even the first draft of document of the Council was called "De fontibus Revelationis". The Second Vatican Council issued a constitution on the word of God. By word, God enters into dialogue with humans. Words allow God to leave his mystery and address humans, in order to present himself and his plan of associating humans to the divine life.

Why did God choose to reveal himself by means of the word? From etymological perspective, the concepts representing the word are: in Hebrew "dabar", and in Greek "logos". *Dabar* refers either to the word itself or to the facts. It is an effective and dynamic word, a creative word which achieves its meaning. In its turn, *logos* indicates a wider concept, as well, indicating a word, an idea, a reason, etc.

Word is ultimately the most important tool to describe realities in their phenomenology, and the tool to communicate with others. Furthermore, word also has power. This is obvious if we consider the influence of mass media.

It should be stated from the very beginning that we are referring to a word that is different from the human word. It is the word of God; therefore, it presents the characteristics of divinity: it is eternal, stable, faithful, vital, and alive, it brings life and salvation. It is the word that comes out from isolation, leaves no room for silence; it is addressed to humans and leads to dialogue and friendship with humans. Psalm 29 describes the "voice of God" as the thunder that breaks the cedars of Lebanon. In the prophetic texts, it is the word of "Adonai" addressed to various prophets: Jeremiah 1:2.4.11; Ezekiel 1:3; Zechariah 1:1.7. God enters the world of humans to communicate with them. Moreover, in view of dialogue, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, offering communion and life.

### *The Function of Words*

First of all, words have informative function. Words inform on facts, things, events. Sciences (terms, concepts, notions), history (chronicles, reports, stories), education (knowledge, concepts) are based on data, information expressed by means of words. It is the most objective aspect of words. Words allow humans to acquire knowledge. A significant example is represented by Adam in Genesis 1-2. The animals created by him pass before him and calls them by name, thus indicating that he identifies and possesses them. Words allow humans to become familiar with realities; they get to know, interpret, organize and become familiar with the world.

Secondly, words have an expressive characteristic. Everyone who speaks expresses itself, they reveal something about themselves. Words express something characteristic of the relevant person, of the inner side of the speaker. Poetry expresses emotions, feelings, experiences, etc. Words allow humans to know themselves and to access their inner mystery, as well as to express themselves.

Thirdly, words indicate a call and a relationship. Human words, by their nature, involve a second person to address to, as humans imply a relationship. In Genesis 2-3, Adam gives calls the animals, but does not speak to them. He needs someone, he needs a "you" resembling himself. Thus, he addresses the woman he can speak to: he can enter into a dialogue with her and meet her. Humans live to meet and communicate. The complex significance, the highest level of the word, can be seen in the language of friendship and love: a language that, in addition to words, also includes gestures, glances, silences, etc. The expressive and relational functions of words achieve their maximum potential when cultivating love.

With respect to the Divine Word, the Bible describes the itinerary of the Word of God: a) who created all (Genesis 1); b) called Abraham (Genesis 12), Moses (Exodus 3:7-14); c) kept the promise to a people (Joshua 1:1-5); d) was addressed to prophets, became a book, and then became flesh – Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:14); e) and eventually spread to the end of the earth (Acts).

The three functions also apply to the Divine Word. God's Word is information. God speaks, teaches, and analyzes humans, the existence, and the history. The same Word becomes law, warning, promise, consolation, and teaching. Furthermore, the Word is expressive. God expresses Himself, speaks about Himself, His nature and life. God reveals his name (YHWH, "Who I am", Emmanuel), the Word who dwells among us, the Lord who saves. Finally, the Word is a calling. God calls, interpellates people. Christians who listen, receive and live the Word, are called; they form the community called *Ekklesia* = the community of the ones called. By means of the word, God wants to have a dialogue, to reach communion [2].

### *Consequences on the Reading of the Bible*

Considering the above, we can say that the Bible cannot be reduced to a merely informative function. The sacred Book not only contains truths, notions addressed to the intellect, it is not just a list of statements. Scripture contains a language with more functions: e.g., in Hosea 11:1-9: God's love for his people, where emotions and feelings are noticed; Romans 7:14- 25: the battle inside the human heart; Paul exclaims, prays, cries, etc.

Secondly, the primacy of obedience. God's Word is a person who speaks to humans, searches humans and invites them. Therefore, the Word must be listened to, as Psalms 95:8 urges: "listen to the voice of the Lord today!" Deuteronomy 6:4 presents the famous prayer "Shema Israel". Solomon, too, had asked for a discerning heart (1Kings 3:9-12). In Exodus 24, after the conclusion of the covenant, the people are given the law and responds: "everything the Lord has said we will do". The Bible requires Christians, a people who listens. Obedience is the answer to revelation and the first dimension of dialogue. In this case, it takes attention not only to the message, but to the one who speaks, who utters the words.

Thirdly, it is necessary to ensure a sapiential reading of the Bible, based on wisdom. Reading the Bible is not necessarily a science, an intellectual knowledge, but rather wisdom, vital knowledge that leads to obedient faith. It is a dialogue of friendship, love and communion of the heart, intentions, life. The Word eventually remains a mystery to be sought, understand, and most of all lived.

To summarize, the Word of God is a divine word, eternal and which gives life. It is a word with a significant historical dimension, a history that is presented and contains teachings. To learn more on the nature of this word, it is necessary to refer to the concept of "Incarnation", the key to understand the revelation and the Scripture. The Incarnation reveals part of the mystery and the fascination of the interpenetration between the divine and the human. The Word of God must be listened to in order to strengthen communion.

## **3. THE REVELATION**

The text in 1John 1:2-3 contains the synthesis of the first chapter of *Dei Verbum*. Dei Verbum 2-5 deals with revelation and its nature. A first question should clarify the definition of revelation: what is revelation? Revelation is life; it is "eternal life" which was with the Father and was shown to us. Eternal life will be participation in divine vitality; anticipation already exists in the communion possible by revelation in Jesus Christ, the Son who became flesh, who can be contemplated, listened to and touched (what we have seen and heard; see 1John 1:2-3).

Revelation is God's free initiative: "in His love, kindness and wisdom, God wished to make Himself known." This revelation does not imply some "decrees", but rather considers the mystery of the divine will or the plan of salvation. Therefore, the object of Revelation is God and how to relate to humans. If we were to look for a definition: Revelation is the project of the Father to invite all people to communion with Himself, in Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The Council also makes reference to a text from Ephesians 1.9 where the term "mystery" is used, indicating the plan of salvation. As regards the reasons, God wanted to make himself known; he wanted to share Himself, the eternal decisions of his will, and wanted to make humans partakers of the divine assets.

The Council also suggests how divine revelation must be understood: it is not a series of facts (decrees), but rather a person, Jesus Christ. Revelation is, in fact, the living presence of God among the people, as can be inferred from the Old Testament. An example might be the divine glory in the image of a cloud accompanying the people during the pilgrimage through the desert (Exodus 16:10; 40:34). Jesus is the new divine theophany; he is the icon and all the divinity dwells in him. Thus, revelation can be described as the communication of divine life identified in the person of Christ.

As regards the manner in which revelation is accomplished and transmitted, it is accomplished through words and deeds manifested in the history of salvation. Everything God does becomes history of salvation. An example of interaction between words and deeds can be found in Exodus 19:4-8: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In other texts, as well, words and deeds represent the history of salvation (see Deuteronomy 5:15-17). In the ecclesiastical language, the expression "history of salvation" appears for the first time here. God reveals himself not only by communicating truths, but expresses the way in which he weaves a history for the salvation of mankind. The sacramental dimension of history is also present: the words and deeds show who God is and what His plan is. It is an economy where every human being has its place and role.

With respect to the location of revelation, God is revealed primarily in the creation (*Dei Verbum* 3) and, in particular, in the man created "in his image" (Genesis 1:27). God is revealed in a more clear way in the history of the people of Israel "through deeds and words closely linked to each other" (*Dei Verbum* 2). Thus, the different forms of revelation are presented, such revelation reaching its highest in Jesus (Hebrew 1:1-2).

The entire revelation has finality. The purpose of revelation is in fact salvation: "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Another goal is communion. Revelation wants to create communion with God and communion among men.

Following the description of the nature of revelation, *Dei Verbum* 5 addresses the theme of the recipient or interlocutor: men, who are offered a friendly dialogue. Revelation is received in faith. Men's response to revelation is faith. What kind of faith is it? It is not an intellectualist one, but total abandonment in the arms of God, trust. An example would be Abraham, father in faith, who believed up to the end. We can also mention the texts in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 which use the phrase "obedience of faith". The answer would have three steps: 1) listening to the Word; 2) receipt-acceptance of the word; 3) confident adherence to the word. Men must entrust their existence and shape it according to God's proposal. It is a meeting and an experience of life. Thus, revelation is a dialog: God speaks to men as to friends.

The second chapter of *Dei Verbum* deals with the theme of transmission of revelation. God is the only source of revelation, but there are two transmission channels: tradition and Scripture. It is probable that Christianity inherited the idea of transmission of revelations from Judaism. In the rabbinic period, there was the written Torah with the 613 precepts, and the verbal Torah, the law verbally transmitted to Moses on Sinai, which is continually transmitted. Similarly to the Jews, for Christians as well verbal tradition is broader than the written Law.

Revelation was entrusted to the Church, whereas the Church transmits it by preaching and by the sacraments, in order to perpetuate salvation. Regarding the transmission phases, we can identify two stages: the era of apostolic preaching of the apostles, then the drafting of the preaching in writing. We have to mention that, in the verbal transmission there was no difference between Scripture and tradition; officially, both represented the Word of God. When the first stage is completed, revelation is entrusted to the Church to be transmitted. Following this stage, only Scripture is considered Word of God, while tradition is aimed to adjust and explain what is revealed in the apostolic era. This tradition consists in the ecclesial reading of the Scripture enriched by the traditions transmitted verbally.

Furthermore, *Dei Verbum* 8 seeks to clarify the nature of the tradition. The term tradition indicates, on the one hand, the content of revelation (active or fondant tradition), while on the other hand it also includes the forms of its transmission (passive or dependent tradition). Tradition refers to the history of the new chosen people who continue the history of salvation started in the Old Testament and which reaches fulfillment in Christ. Tradition is not only a collection to be preserved and defended, but rather a heritage to be analyzed and developed. Therefore, tradition constantly develops the content of revelation: bishops have official mandate; however, laypersons also contribute to this development in their domains, each according to its mission and charisma, 1Corinthians 12-13; Ephesians 4:11-16.

*Dei Verbum* 9 addresses the relationship between tradition and Scripture. Scripture and tradition are closely linked and form a single reality; both convey the same revelation, but in different ways. Scripture transmits the Word in an official manner; actually, inspired Scripture is the Word. Tradition transmits the Word. From an official point of view, tradition is human word that conveys the word of God. Scripture and tradition are two complementary realities that communicate with each other (see *Dei Verbum* 10: “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are the unique heritage of the Word of God entrusted to the Church”). Scripture does not exhaust tradition; it needs tradition to be understood and updated.

The sixth chapter of the Constitution is entitled “Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church.” No. 21 recommends the frequent use of the Scripture. Church venerates the Scripture, as does the Eucharist. It is also highlighted how Bible is food. Moreover, it is a memorial of the Lord’s great deeds and revitalizes faith. In addition, Bible is regarded as the supreme rule of faith and perennial source of spiritual life. As for the practical indications, Christians should have broad access to the Bible (*Dei Verbum* 22), to read the holy books. Then, there should be a greater familiarity with the Word.

### *Consequences and Implementation*

At this point, we need to highlight the phrasing of the Council. The Council did not state: the material content of tradition is broader than the Scripture! Tradition is dependent on the word, whereas the word is understood and rendered alive by tradition. The Church draws its teaching on Tradition or Scripture. When the content of Scripture is not clear enough, reference is made to tradition: *e.g.*, the assumption of Mary. Furthermore, the Council avoids to state whether all revelation is contained in the sacred books or there is revealed truths not contained in the sacred books; it only states that what was revealed in the sacred books was written by divine inspiration. The Fathers had discussed some traditions which, though not recorded in the Bible, would be originated from the apostles: the baptizing of children, the text on the baptismal promises, the renunciation to Satan, the prayer while kneeling, the ritual of the Eucharist, the validity of baptism administered by heretics, etc.

Another question to be discussed relates to the transmission of revelation. The Council text does not clarify whether tradition contains elements of faith transmitted only by tradition and not recognized by the Scripture! The main statement concerns the close cohesion between Scripture and Tradition: Sacred Tradition and Bible are like *a single mirror* in which the pilgrim Church contemplates God (*Dei Verbum* 7-8). Every Christian can contribute to the development of revelation by studying the Bible and tradition, as well as by the life of faith.

As regards the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, Scripture is rooted in tradition, but tradition also needs to confirm its contents in the light of Scripture (*Dei Verbum* 9-10). Tradition is always developing, while Scripture was completed with the apostolic age. We have to note that it is not the original apostolic tradition that is developing, but the understanding of the data in the revelation is greater under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we need to consider that there cannot be a tradition completely independent of Scripture. In fact, Scripture was formed within tradition.

Finally, *Dei Verbum* 10 claims that Church cannot turn human word into divine word. The Magisterium is not above the Word. Church has the function to preserve, interpret and update the Word. What evolves over time is not revelation, but the understanding of revelation.

Church must transmit revelation in its entirety and in a lively manner. Therefore, no element of revelation can be lost; then, the vital force from the beginning cannot be lost.

#### 4. BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: NEW IDEAS ON INTERPRETATION

The *Dei Verbum* Constitution is a point of arrival for biblical hermeneutics. Hermeneutics studies the rules for the interpretation of texts and their correct application. The theological level and the updating are at the forefront, as well as the broader context of the work or of revelation.

*Dei Verbum* 12 provides some essential instructions for interpretation. A prerequisite is necessary before the identification of the teachings of the Council. God's intention to reveal Himself to men by the sacred writers and their texts is higher: it goes far deeper than what they were able to communicate in their own words. As can be seen in the text, *Dei Verbum* separated two intentions by the conjunction "and": "what hagiographers really intended to communicate" and "what God wished to reveal through their words". Hence, the need to discover God's intention, what God wanted to convey to us.

With respect to the instruction of the Council, first it is necessary to have a thorough exegetical analysis. We must examine carefully what God wanted to communicate by words, to discover the sacred author's intention. The text has to be analyzed in order to identify the literal meaning of the text (linguistic aspect).

Secondly, we need to use the literary and historical criticism. To this end, textual criticism must be used in order to establish the original text. Then, the literary criticism: forms, genres, literary styles and the relevant context (historical and cultural conditions). Thus, one can discover what God wanted to communicate by the sacred author. In order to identify the hagiographic intent, it is necessary to carefully analyze the literary genres. The literary form facilitates the identification of the intent and message of the author. Furthermore, the social context needs to be considered, as well as the historical and the cultural context of the biblical writings. Finally, we need to refer to historical criticism: historical contextualization (who wrote, where, when, how, and why?). At this point, we need to consider the concept of history and truth in the Hebrew and Greek world. All these objectives can be achieved using the historical and critical method. This is a method strongly encouraged by the documents of the Church, as it presents the historical dimension of revelation.

Thirdly, we need to apply a number of principles of theological hermeneutics. Thus, the reading of the Bible must be done "in the Spirit". It is necessary for the Scripture to be read and interpreted in the same Holy Spirit in which it was written. According to Origen: "what comes from the Holy Spirit, can be fully understood only through the Spirit." How can this kind of reading be achieved? This is possible by a reading done faithfully, in the spirit of conversion and obedience. The Holy Spirit helps us to accurately understand, internalize and interpret Scripture. It is necessary to combine the objective or external elements (*i.e.*, relating to the text, to the hagiographer) with the subjective or inner ones (the Holy Spirit and the interpreter of the sacred books).

Then, the Council indicates three principles. Above all, it is necessary to have a global interpretation, always looking for unity. It is necessary to respect the content and unity of the entire Holy Scripture ("analogy of Scripture"). Bible must be read using the Bible (canonical exegesis), as it contains the truth necessary for salvation. As regards unity, this is provided by Christ. The starting point is the only Holy Spirit in which the Bible was written, both the Old and the New Testament. We also need to consider the unity of the themes in the Scripture, the most important being the history of salvation. Then, the Bible must be read taking into account its progressive character, the development of aspects in history. For example, a certain theme needs to be considered in all the biblical passages where it is present and analyzed considering its evolution in the biblical books.

Secondly, genuine exegesis must always be performed in the Church, where Scripture is listened to, meditated and understood. Interpretation is done in the living tradition of the entire

Church, starting from Christ and the Apostles. Divine revelation is entrusted to the entire Church, where the Word is preserved, transmitted and interpreted. The Bible is read in the Church and with the Church. In this context, the most important is the Word, and the Magisterium and exegesis are in the service of the Word and serve God's people.

Thirdly, it is necessary to have the analogy of faith: attention to the cohesion between the truths of faith, as well as in the total project (the global plan) of revelation. The analogy of faith emphasizes how biblical interpretation must be consistent and in harmony with Scripture and with the faith of the tradition of the Church (the more ambiguous passages of the Bible must be interpreted in the light of the fragments less ambiguous). We need to analyze the theological dimension of the biblical texts.

Finally, when reading the Scripture, we seek to identify the word, the message God wants to convey to us. We must always ask ourselves what God wants from us, what lies behind a particular text. Hence, the requirement for update. In the end, we also need to mention that God updates revelation according to the capacity of the people to receive such revelation.

### *The Meanings of the Scripture According to Dei Verbum*

The meaning of Sacred Scripture is the truth that God - the main author of the Bible - intends to express through the words of the hagiographers. Following an old tradition, one can distinguish two meanings of the Scripture: the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning.

The first step is the identification of the literal meaning, *i.e.* the author's intent, the meaning that the author had in mind and wanted to convey in the text. This is, in fact, the meaning expressed by the words, which is identified through the philological analysis, significant concepts, style, the structure of text, genre, author and the editing, the purpose (as elements of the historical and critical method). To this end, it is necessary to understand the language of the Bible, the biblical history, and ancient culture. Furthermore, the work on the text is essential. In this study, all biblical texts are important, and one should not only consider those passages that allow for a vital and existential interpretation. In looking for this meaning, it must be considered that the human author was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In principle, Church has not officially expressed an opinion, by means of dogmas, about the interpretation of certain biblical texts; sometimes biblical passages were cited to support dogmatic statements on the implications of the Scripture in the life of Christians. Therefore, the literal meaning of Scripture must be deciphered by scholars, enjoying liberty in this respect.

It should be emphasized that the text, as transmitted to the Church, contains several interpretations of the meaning as compared to the one provided by the human author (the literal meaning allows for new interpretations in new contexts). These opportunities are updated by the history of the redemptive work of God throughout the history and the world. We can say, therefore, that history is a hermeneutical principle of interpretative revelation, where the Holy Spirit continues to inspire and speak [3].

The second stage is the identification of the *over-literal meaning*, the one that transcends the literal meaning. The Bible has a perennial and universal message which goes beyond what the author wanted to convey to his contemporaries. The divine author wanted to render a message which goes beyond the historical, spatial and temporal limitations. Thus, it is necessary to go beyond the word, in order to reach the Spirit which gives life and freedom.

The biblical texts have a spiritual meaning, namely the "meaning expressed by the texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the light of the Christ's paschal mystery and the new life that results therefrom." [4] Spiritual sense should not be erroneously considered as being the subjective interpretations, the result of imagination or of the intellectual exercise.

The spiritual meaning is identified in relation to Christ, the paschal mystery, and the new life (it often applies to the texts of the Old Testament). The literal and literary methods focused on synchronous aspects can be of help in this respect.

A more recent alternative uses the ides of *sensus plenior*, *i.e.*, a deeper meaning revealed by God, but incomprehensible to the human author. The Holy Spirit, main author of the Scripture,



would have rendered a broader meaning. Many passages of the Old Testament have been reinterpreted by the New Testament (e.g., Isaiah 7:14 resumed in Matthew 1:23), and by the holy Fathers, in the attempt to identify the “plenior” meaning [5]. The process of reinterpretation could also be accounted by: a) the transformations in the historical circumstances leading to the revision of the text; b) the maturation of the community who reads that text in a new perspective; c) the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, so as to thoroughly understand the text. Thus, we can identify a hermeneutic triangle which includes history, maturation and charisma.

Another aspect relates to the *typical meaning*, namely the deeper meaning of the elements (people, places, events) in the Scripture, as image of a future reality. The realities of the past are types, whereas the future ones are anti-types (e.g., the manna was a type of Eucharist; Adam is a type of Christ, the paschal lamb was a type of Jesus, etc.). The relationship between type and anti-type is not that of a perfect configuration, but rather of similarity by analogy.

Finally, we can emphasize the ideal of harmonious synthesis between the literal and the spiritual meaning, between the divine and the human aspect of the Bible.

### *Synthesis and Guidelines for Interpretation*

In view of an accurate interpretation [6], we must first consider some principles expressed in a negative manner. First, one should avoid at all costs a fundamentalist reading that lead to an *ad litteram* interpretation of the sacred books (the Bible), without taking into account the critical approach (a rigid interpretation). Such fundamentalism is followed by some new cults which use a literal interpretation of the biblical word. Such an interpretation is not true to either the literal or the spiritual meaning. At the same time, it overlooks the strong relationship between the divine and the human, as reflected in the Incarnation. Finally, it does not consider the historical realities and the cultural limitations of the biblical era, and ignores the contribution of the sacred authors who used their skills, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Secondly, the overly “spiritualized” reading is to be avoided. This exaggerated spiritualism is contrary to an accurate interpretation of the Bible, as it focuses on the personal, free and generic ideas in the sacred text, without a rigorous presentation of the real meaning. Certain “charismatic” readings lead to subjectivism, often manipulating the word of God, and applying one’s feelings and emotions to the text.

Thirdly, an exclusively exegetical study should not be encouraged, as it would reduce the Bible to a merely text from the past, thus rendering it literature or history.

Fourthly, one should not refer to a secularized and positivist hermeneutics, excluding the divine and the supernatural component.

Finally, one must avoid a forced historicized reading, as well as the exegesis ignoring history and tradition.

At positive level, the following could be suggested. First of all, the historical and critical method remains indispensable; however, it must be supplemented by other methods focusing on the synchronous analysis and on the semantic potential in the text. The narrative analysis, the rhetorical and semiotic methods, are all to be encouraged.

Secondly, the interpretation must take into account the faith of the ecclesial community and the light of the Holy Spirit. To this end, an inculturation of the biblical message is essential.

Thirdly, the analysis of the text should be supplemented by the theological applications. Exegesis should also be theology; it should make reference to God and to his plan of salvation. Exegesis is a theological discipline aimed at the development of faith and the authentic transmission of the content of the inspired Scripture, in the Church.

Finally, an update is possible and necessary, but it should not manipulate texts (an update performed in the dynamics of the living tradition of the community of faith). The word of God is alive and it is necessary to speak to the current human being.

Furthermore, the debate on interpretation can be summarized in the desire for hermeneutics to allow for a balance between the human and the divine aspect of Scripture, between faith and reason, between the literal and the spiritual meaning [7].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

First of all, the Council intended to emphasize the centrality of the Word. The “*Dei Verbum*” title is not a coincidence. The Word shall be the center of the liturgy, catechesis, prayer and Christian culture. The Word shall be addressed to the children of the Church: strength of faith; food for the spirit; pure and inexhaustible source of spiritual life. This Word deserves a profound worship both at personal and at Community level. The Council states that one receives the bread of life from the table of the Word and of the Eucharist. The divine Word lies in the text of the Scripture; however, it is also the personal Word, the incarnated Logos. Hence, the need for a personal relationship with Jesus, the Incarnated Word.

The Word must be listened to: we must be willing to accept the dialogue with God. The Council suggests the “religious obedience”, both for the one transmitting the word and for the receiver. Acts 6:4 refers to the “service of the Word” as a main task of the apostles. Before speaking, one must listen to the word in “religious silence”. There is an analogy with what the apostles did, as they first “saw and heard” and then proclaimed the word. This proclamation created communion between Christ and the faithful, as well as communion between the faithful (*Dei Verbum* 1), as communion with Jesus, the Word of God, leads to communion between brothers. As regards the nature of obedience, it should be the “*auditus fidei*”, “*obedientia fidei*”, *i.e.*, an implementation of the words considering the dimension of the covenant and of love. Once it is read and listened to, the divine Word needs to be analyzed and meditated.

The second conclusion regards the novelty of the ideas on revelation. One of the most innovative aspects resides in the fact that this revelation focuses on communication and transmission of life. Revelation is described using St. John’s words, namely the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to the apostles and to all the people, so that humans can participate in it. Revelation is divine life manifested and lived in communion with humans (*Dei Verbum* 1-2). This also presents the meaning of revelation. It is not new knowledge; by his revelation, God speaks to humans as to friends, and makes them participate in his communion. This revelation is realized by words and deeds that render a history, a redemptive history. Furthermore, all these are focused on the purpose of redemption. Paul VI introduced the phrase “*nostrae salutis causa*” (cause of/reason for our salvation).

Revelation should be considered and read from positive perspective: revelation which is dialogue; it is personal and redemptive. However, the main key to understanding revelation is the “Incarnation” event. The mystery of the Incarnation explains the complexity of the inspiration of the sacred texts; as Jesus grew up gradually following the human laws of development, the same can be applied to the laws of literary composition: verbal tradition followed by final editing; the two meanings are also accounted for: the literal and the spiritual meaning; then, we can explain the human and the historical elements of the Bible.

A third conclusion regards the need for an accurate interpretation of Scripture. A principle developed along history relates to the continuous reinterpretation in the light of the expectations and the experiences of the community of faith. In view of an accurate interpretation, *Dei Verbum* 12 encourages familiarity with the mentality and the writing style characteristic to the biblical times. Then, it is necessary to analyze the literary genres and the historical context. As regards the principles, the three principles still apply: a) the reading and the interpretation in the light of the Holy Spirit; b) the general unity of revelation; c) the analogy of faith and its inclusion in tradition.

Finally, at existential level, it is recommended for the interpretation of the Bible not to be limited to an analysis of the texts from the perspective of reason, but rather an analysis with the heart. The study of Sacred Scripture should lead to a loving knowledge of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

The last conclusion refers to the relationship between Scripture and the Church. If this relationship is ignored, one can reach two extremes. On the one hand, Scripture without the Church led to some Protestant interpretation where the only way to communicate with God is the Bible. This leads to the danger of subjectivity and the ignoring of the community dimension. On the other hand, religious life without Scripture leads to a break with the life of faith, where personal dialogue

with God does not exist. We can think of the Catholics before the Council, when everything was inside the church, being limited to repetition of rites unknown to believers.

With respect to the religious life in the Church, the reading of the Bible and a greater familiarity with the Word are encouraged. In the past, there was a separation between the people and the Bible, caused by different contexts. Beginning with the Council of Toulouse in 1229, there is information of restrictions on reading the Bible. Pope Paul IV (1559) and Pius IV (1564), promulgating the list of books removed from the index, prohibited the printing and the possession of the Bible in the language of the people. Thus, in order to have access to the Bible, one needed a special permission. This is why the Church insisted on the Magisterium and the Tradition: the use of the Tridentine catechism, followed by the catechism of Pius X, in 1913.

With respect to the specific issues related to Word, the first question regards the preaching. Revelation is no longer seen as “the source of truth” to be protected and transmitted through preaching. The prologue of the *Dei Verbum* quotes 1John stating that the object of preaching is “the eternal life which was with the Father”. Therefore, the object of preaching (the subject) is God himself manifested and communicated to man. It is not something speculative or abstract, but rather something vital: revelation transmits divine life! A second question regards catechesis. Is the activity of catechizing focused on the transmission of truths of faith or on the development of a relationship with a person? By revelation, God communicates himself.

The Constitution encourages the identification of methods and initiatives for a better familiarization and understanding of the Scripture. Subsequent documents suggest other guidelines for the promotion of the Bible, observing the principles of inculturation and update, which are to be transformed in the light of tradition and fidelity.

*Dei Verbum* aims at presenting the authentic doctrine on divine revelation and its transmission so that, by announcing salvation, the whole world by listening to believe, by believing to hope, and by hoping to love.

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